

# Local lumberjack helps hobbyists retrieve weather balloon

by Marty Seeger  
Leader staff writer

LEWIS – It was as normal as any other day for Geno Cummings on the morning of Tuesday, May 22, when he received a call from the village of Frederic, asking if he had time to help a couple of men who had a weather balloon stuck in a tree near Lewis. Cummings is a professional lumberjack who performs all across the country in logrolling, chainsaw carving and axe throwing, and of course, pole climbing. The weather balloon was over 50 feet in a tree, and Cummings was the perfect man for the job.

“At first I thought, ‘yeah whatever,’” said Cummings, but he soon learned the two men were for real, and grabbed his hooks and headed for a piece of property near Lewis.

The two men were Kerry Rosenhagen and Ryan Johnson from a group out of

the Twin Cities called BHALDI, also known as balloon-based high-altitude digital imaging. The group works with high school students and other groups to send cameras to space and back, using plastic foam coolers attached to a helium-filled weather balloon.

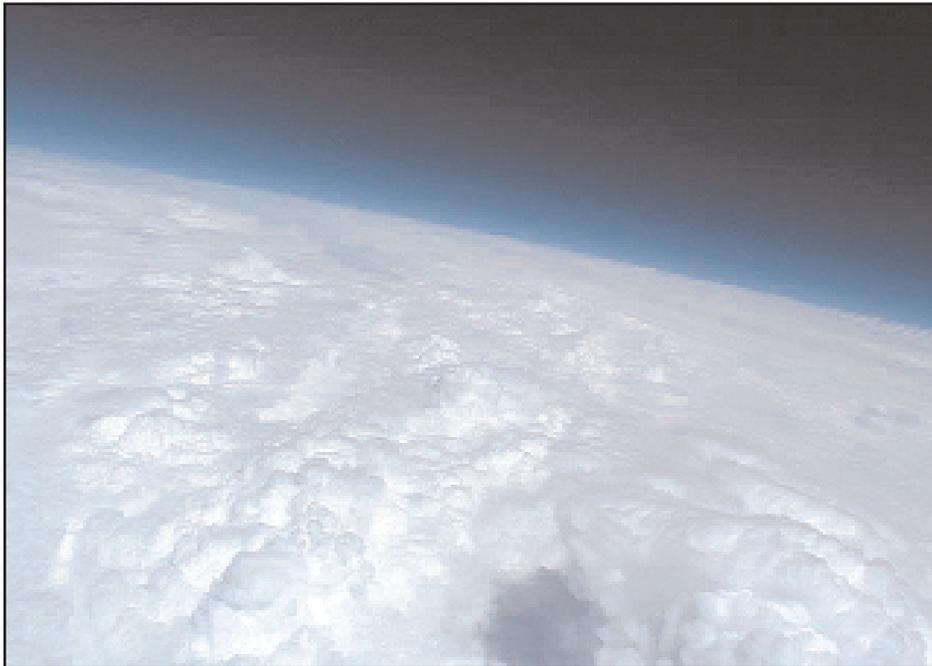
This is the seventh launch by the group, who was working along with Cub Scout Pack 270 out of Rosemount, Minn., for this particular launch.

“This is about as far as we’ve had them go. And usually they fly like east and south more than they go northeast,” said Rosenhagen.

When a balloon is launched, Rosenhagen and Johnson explained, the balloon is about six feet in diameter, and eventually climbs to 95,000 feet, taking still photos and video along its path to space, taking some breathtaking photos and capturing atmospheric data, baro-



Geno Cummings (center) holds a weather balloon he helped retrieve from 50 feet up in a tree on Tuesday, May 22. Kerry Rosenhagen, (left) and Ryan Johnson launched the weather balloon from Lakeville, Minn., and it ended up landing in Lewis. Rosenhagen and Johnson are part of a group called balloon-based high altitude digital imaging. – Photo by Marty Seeger



Just one of hundreds of still photos that was captured by a weather balloon, that eventually landed near Lewis.

metric pressure and temperature inside and outside of the plastic foam cooler. They also have an accelerometer to see how fast it’s moving and shaking around.

As the balloon rises farther into the atmosphere and the air pressure decreases, it expands to a size of about 36 to 40 feet in diameter and pops. It then falls back to Earth with the aid of a parachute. A GPS tracking device is also on board, so they can track its every move, and eventually its whereabouts. In this case, 50 feet up in a tree near Lewis.

“When we get two points from the same spots, we know it’s landed,” Johnson said.

In the seven launches the group has done, none have been lost, and they’ll continue to plan more in the future. The group started as a school project, but it turned out to be so much fun, they decided to do more. The BHALDI team is also interested in doing other science and engineering projects in the future in hopes to expand. They have a Web site up along with past missions and images at [www.bhaldi.org](http://www.bhaldi.org), as well as a Facebook page.

“We just do it for schools and kids, and it’s just fun,” said Rosenhagen.